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South Carolina House of Representatives

Legislative Update & Research Reports

Robert J. Sheheen, Speaker of the House

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Results of the 1990 Issues Survey

Health care costs topped the list of issues in this year's membership survey of priority issues for the 1990 session. Also ranked high on the list is Hurricane Hugo recovery efforts and solid waste management.

How the survey was conducted

This was the fourth year the House Research Office has conducted an issues survey of the membership prior to the opening of the session. The survey was mailed December 1 to all House members with a final return date of December 11.

This year's response was down slightly from last year's. A little over half the House members -- 53.2 percent -- returned their survey forms for tabulation. Close to 60 percent of the House membership -- 57.7 percent -- responded to last year's poll. As always, legislators were asked to respond to the survey anonymously.

As was done in years past, the 124 House members were asked to rank a wide ranging list of issues, 27 in all. The issues used in the survey were compiled by the House Research Office from information gathered from various sources, including legislative committee staffs and media reports. A scale of 1 to 5 was used to rank the importance of the issues, with 5 representing the highest priority and 1, the lowest.

In addition, space was provided for House members to list any priority issues not appearing on the list provided. The representatives also were asked to name the top three issues for the 1990 session.

It is important to note that the survey results in no way reflect how House members will vote on a particular issue. Rather, the sample is an indication of how responding House members think issues should be addressed during the upcoming legislative debate.

How the issues ranked

Of the 27 issues House members were asked to rank, here is how the issues fared. The brief description, which appeared in the survey, is repeated here for better understanding of the rankings. Following this list are the details of how each issues was scored.

1. **Health Care Costs**
Containment of rising health care costs.
2. **Hurricane Hugo Recovery**
Whether additional revenue sources will be needed, and if so, which will be used.
3. **Solid Waste Management**
Handling the disposing of solid waste in light of dwindling landfill space.
4. **Hazardous Waste Disposal**
Further strengthening of hazardous waste regulations.
5. **Rural Health**
Status of health care in rural areas, including availability of health professionals and hospital care.
6. **Highway Safety**
Further strengthening of highway safety laws, especially DUI.
7. **Consolidated Government**
Enabling legislation to allow local governments to consolidate services.
8. **Automobile Insurance**
Further ways of reforming the state's automobile insurance system.
9. **Wetlands**
Protection of the state's fresh and saltwater wetlands through management programs.
10. **Local Option Sales Tax**
Alternative sources of funding for local governments.
11. **Community Colleges**
Allowing the state's technical colleges to award associate degrees.

12. **State Tax Deduction for Retirees**
Whether it should be given, who should get it if given, and how to pay for it.
13. **Equal Rights Legislation**
Strengthening the state's laws prohibiting discrimination in public places.
14. **Beachfront Management**
Loosening the restrictions of the 1988 Beach Protection Act.
15. **Motor Vehicle Inspection**
Changes to, or repeal of, the state law on motor vehicle inspections.
16. **Assault Weapons**
Restrictions on sale or possession.
17. **Judicial Selection**
How the state selects its judges.
18. **Lobbying Reform**
Strengthening the reporting and record keeping of lobbyists.
19. **Worker's Compensation**
Further changes in the law.
20. **Abortion**
Whether the state should place restrictions on abortions.
21. **25 Year Retirement**
Reduce the years of service required for retirement of teachers and state employees.
22. **Mandatory Helmet Use**
Requiring all motorcycle riders and passengers to wear helmets.
23. **Real Estate Appraisers and Agents**
Regulation of appraisers and continuing education for agents' licensure.
24. **Obscene Bumper Stickers (tied)**
Standards for what can be displayed on automobile bumper stickers.

School Attendance and Driver's Licenses

School attendance required for driver's license for school-aged drivers.

25. Pari-Mutuel Sports Act

Referendum to allow horse and greyhound racing with wagering; creation of S.C. Racing Commission.

26. Saltwater Fishing License

License fee established.

How the 27 issues were ranked

Each issue was ranked by computing the number of tallies it received in each of the 1 to 5 priority rankings. With the number of responding House members, the highest possible score was 330; the lowest, 66. For example, the top rated issue, Health Care Costs, received a total score of 295. This score was computed by multiplying by 5 the 39 "five" priority votes the issue received; by 4 the 20 "four" priority votes; and so on. Answers in the "no opinion" column were not used. By computing a score for each issue this way, they could be fairly compared and ranked.

The following chart shows each issue in order of priority ranking and the number of votes its received in each category. The "no opinion" votes are not shown since they counted nothing toward the total score.

Potential Issue	Priority					Total
	High 5	4	3	2	Low 1	
Health Care Costs	39	20	6	1	0	295
Hurricane Hugo Recovery	46	8	6	5	1	291
Solid Waste Management	40	15	7	4	0	289
Hazardous Waste Disposal	25	19	17	4	0	260
Rural Health	26	14	15	8	2	249
Highway Safety	19	21	17	7	2	246
Consolidated Government	23	16	17	3	5	241

Potential Issue	Priority					Total
	High 5	4	3	2	Low 1	
Automobile Insurance	24	15	12	6	8	236
Wetlands	20	15	17	5	9	230
Local Option Sales Tax	26	13	7	5	15	228
Community Colleges	16	18	14	9	9	221
SC Tax Deduction for Retirees	18	9	18	12	8	212
Equal Rights Legislation	14	13	21	8	7	208
Beachfront Management	17	9	21	5	12	206
Motor Vehicle Inspection	16	11	13	11	14	199
Assault Weapons	13	11	18	11	10	195
Judicial Selection	10	17	14	9	15	193
Lobbying Reform	8	17	16	9	16	190
Worker's Compensation	11	7	25	11	8	188
Abortion	17	5	13	7	22	180
25 Year Retirement	14	5	10	11	26	168
Mandatory Helmet Use	7	7	15	10	26	154
Real Estate Appraiser & Agent	4	4	23	16	16	153
Obscene Bumper Stickers	7	7	12	11	29	150
School Attendance for License	3	9	19	10	22	150
Parl-Mutuel Sports Act	8	8	8	7	35	145
Saltwater Fishing License	1	0	19	12	31	117

Other Issues

Besides the list of 27 issues in the survey, House members added a number of their own. At the end of the survey, the membership was given the chance to add any potential issue not among the 27 already issued.

Here is a list of those issues added by responding House members.

- School building construction
- Dropouts
- Adult illiteracy
- Restructuring of the Department of Education

- Prisons
- Drug abuse elimination
- Criminal justice reform

- Minimum requirement for building, state code
- Requirement for counties to have building codes
- Training for local building inspectors
- Examination of regulations on housing insurance
- Minimum standards for rental buildings

- State Budget
- Debt ceiling from 8 to 12 percent
- Review of sales tax exclusions
- Tax restructuring for local to state level
- Reassessment of property

- State health insurance
- Child health care
- Child care
- Restructuring Department of Social Services

- Recycling
- Job development for teenagers
- Small business expansion and development
- Infrastructure development in rural areas

- Hatch Act for Public Employees
- Initiative and referendum petition
- Recall of elected or appointed officials
- Attorneys who practice before judges and commissions who are beholden to them.

Naming the top three issues

As the final part of the survey, House members were asked to name the top three issues of the upcoming legislative session. A number of House members left this question blank, so these numbers reflect a smaller pool of responses than the priority ranking.

Despite this, the results show that the top three issues named most frequently by responding House members reflect the same issues that topped the priority scoring. In order to accurately reflect the response of the representatives, however, the top three issues are expanded to four issues. These are

1. Hurricane Hugo Recovery
2. Waste Disposal -- both solid and hazardous wastes
3. Health Care Costs

While these issues change places slightly from the ranking they received from the priority listing, the response still indicates that these four issues -- hurricane recovery, health care costs, and solid and hazardous waste disposal -- are uppermost on the minds of House members responding to the survey.

A number of other issues were mentioned in this category, although not enough to make the top list. Some frequently mentioned issues included:

- Automobile Insurance
- Local Option Sales Tax
- Education Funding
- Drug Elimination
- Beachfront Management
- Abortion

Background on the Top Ten Issues

To assist House members with upcoming speeches, newsletters and constituent question, here is some background on the top ten issues named in this year's House survey. Thanks to the House standing committee staffs and to David Murday of the Health Care Planning and Oversight Committee for their assistance with this information.

1. Health Care Costs

Health care costs are continuing to rise not only in South Carolina but across the nation due to factors such as inflation, escalating nurses salaries, new technologies and the aging of the population. Blue Cross/Blue Shield reports that charges for health care in South Carolina have gone up approximately 70 percent over the past three years. Charges per hospital stay increased 19 percent between 1987 and 1988, according to Budget and Control Board figures.

Additionally, many employers face rising health insurance costs for their employees, and many individuals are finding it increasingly difficult to afford health insurance.

Currently, there are two legislative task forces studying health care costs: one under the aegis of the Health Care Planning and Oversight Committee and the second under the auspices of the Senate Insurance Committee. In addition, the S.C. Hospital Association recently completed a study on the issue, and the S.C. Medical Association is conducting a statewide survey of health costs.

These rapidly rising costs make health insurance and cost containment an area likely to receive legislation attention in 1990. Containment of health care costs will involve consideration of a number of approaches, including possible expansion of public and private health insurance coverage, expansion of Medicaid to cover more people, and putting more resources into prevention, education and "lifestyle" management.

2. Hurricane Hugo Recovery

When Hurricane Hugo blew ashore in September, it left more than just debris to be cleaned up. A number of issues have arisen from the storm's impact. One central question is what amount, and how, the state will end up paying its share of hurricane-related damages. Current estimates place the state's share at \$40 million. This includes the state's payback to the Federal Emergency Management Administration, the Family Assistance match for DSS, replacement of the Beach Renourishment bond and local government loan, and state, local, county and municipal obligations. The Budget and Control Board recently proposed paying for state-related Hugo costs through a Bond Bill.

In addition to the budget question, a number of other topics also have surfaced. Among the possible hurricane-associated issues are statewide building standards, better emergency preparedness and communications, the long-range impact on the timber industry, insurance coverage of homeowners and businesses, standards for rental housing, the impact on the tourism industry, and the number of school days to be completed by children affected by the storm.

3. Solid Waste Management

Rapidly filling landfills, as well as new EPA regulations, have made solid waste disposal an issue of concern among the House members surveyed. Currently, 4 million tons of household waste are generated each year in South Carolina, and it is estimated that 16 counties will run out of landfill space within the next five years. South Carolina is one of only eight states without a waste reduction law.

A 17-member Legislative Task Force to Study Alternatives to Landfill Disposition of Solid Waste is to report back to the General Assembly with recommendations by January.

At its December meeting, the task force received a proposal from task force chairman, Sen. Thomas Moore of Aiken. The proposal, which Moore termed a working document for the committee's consideration, includes a 30 percent reduction of waste sent to landfills within five years; a 25 percent recycling goal within five years of legislative enactment; restrictions on the use of plastic containers; and restrictions on the disposal of used oils, tires, lead-acid batteries, yard trash and appliances. No action on the proposal has been taken by the task force.

4. Hazardous Waste Disposal

Several pieces of House legislation carried forward from last session may be addressed this year. These bills cover such topics as limiting the amount of out-of-state waste that can be accepted in South Carolina, reducing the amount of overall waste that a landfill can accept, establishment of the S.C. Hazardous Waste Disposal Authority, DHEC site suitability studies and increasing the tax on out-of-state waste.

Several proposals to reduce the waste cap on the Pinewood facility are expected, including one proposal from the governor. Also expected for legislative consideration early in the session are new site criteria regulations from DHEC.

Last session, the General Assembly passed H.3326. This new hazardous waste law increased landfilling fees for both in-state and out-of-state waste; prohibits the disposal of waste from political jurisdictions that do not allow disposal within their own boundaries; requires better financial information from waste disposal companies; requires DHEC to develop site suitability standards by June 1, 1990, and created the Hazardous Waste Management Research Fund. The oversight committee of the Research Fund had its first meeting last month.

5. Rural Health

The availability of rural health care is an issue that is growing on a number of fronts: the financial crisis confronting rural hospitals as patient admissions decline, the recruitment of doctors and other health professionals, and the availability of emergency medical services in isolated, rural areas. The Joint Legislative Health Care Planning and Oversight Committee issued a study and a number of recommendations on the rural health care crisis last session.

6. Highway Safety

For the past two sessions, highway safety has been a prominent issue before the General Assembly. In 1988, the Legislature passed the Highway Safety Act, which among other provisions, significantly strengthened DUI penalties. Last year, H.3848, another bill dealing with highway safety, was introduced by the House Education and Public Works Committee. Referred to the House Judiciary Committee, the bill was recently reported out and will be on the House calendar for consideration in January. Among the provisions of this new highway safety bill are increased penalties for reckless homicide, driving under suspension, DUI, and driving uninsured.

7. Consolidated Government

The South Carolina Constitution, Article VIII, Sec. 12 (local government) relating to the consolidation of counties with municipalities and other political subdivisions, provides that "any county may consolidate with the municipalities and other political subdivisions within its limits into a single unit of government, which shall be known as a consolidated political subdivision." H.3484, pending before the House Judiciary Committee, would provide local governments with the enabling legislation to use the powers granted to them in Article VIII, Sec. 12. The bill provides the means for consolidation and a method for creating consolidated governments.

Some communities already have started exploring the possibilities of consolidating their local governments. In Charleston, a consolidation committee is planning to issue its final recommendations to the Charleston County Council soon.

8. Local Option Sales Tax

The Local Sales and Use Tax Bill (H.3739), which would provide local governments with an alternative revenue source in the form of a 1 cent local option sales tax, was passed by the House and Senate last session and is currently before a conference committee.

The House-passed version of the bill provides for 50 percent of the tax to go for a property tax rollback and 50 percent to go to local governments. The Senate version earmarked 75 percent of the revenue collected for the rollback and 25 percent for local government revenues. The conference committee discussions have centered on what percentage of the tax will go for a property tax relief.

9. Automobile Insurance

Automobile insurance has continued to be a popular topic in the "Letters to the Editor" columns during the interim, despite the fact that the provisions of the Automobile Insurance Reform Act of 1989 have not yet had time to fully take effect. The 1990 session may see attempts to further reform the automobile insurance system. One prefiled bill would reduce from three years to two years the period in which an insurance company may inspect a driver's record to determine whether the driver meets certain parts of the objective standard criteria.

10. Wetlands Protection

In an effort to protect South Carolina's valuable freshwater and saltwater wetlands, the General Assembly will be facing several proposals this year. The Governor's Task Force on the Wetlands is expected to issue recommendations early in the session.

More Staff Changes

James L. Mann Cromer, Jr. has been appointed staff counsel to the House Labor, Commerce and Industry Committee. "Bubba" Cromer replaces Dwight Hayes who will be joining the State Reorganization Commission on a consulting basis.

Bubba is a native Columbian, who attended Dreher High School and Clemson University, where he was an English and Communications major. He received his law degree from USC in 1988.

Following graduation from USC Law School, Bubba practiced law with a Los Angeles firm. However, his desire to work in South Carolina brought him back to the state last September. Before accepting the LCI position, Bubba worked with the hurricane relief effort in Dorchester County.